



## Market and Trade Data

### Organic Basics for the French Marketplace

**By Laurent J. Journo**

Almost half of French consumers have eaten an organic product in the past year, with best sellers including fruits, vegetables, eggs, and breads. Many favor organic products because of their health and environmental benefits, and find organic production consistent with animal welfare.

#### Organic Trends To Watch

For market newcomers looking for a niche, the organic food service sector remains underdeveloped in France, though many restaurants are beginning to develop organic dishes to satisfy a growing customer appetite. Some municipalities are also

beginning to include organic foods in school menus.

The supermarket has traditionally served as the primary distribution outlet for organic products, but consumers are increasingly buying them in specialized outlets such as Biocoop, Naturalia, and La Vie Claire. Such outlets may sell 4,000 - 8,000 organic products, compared to supermarkets that might carry 150 - 200 products.

#### U.S. Products Designated Third Country (non-EU)

Third-country food products can be deemed organic when the European Commission approves the country of origin as maintaining an equivalent system of government rules for organic production and processing. While the United States and the EU (European Union) have not concluded an organic equivalency agreement, France will approve U.S. organic operators and their products on a case-by-case basis.

Under French guidelines, the labeling and advertising of organic products are subject to details governed by the percentage of organic ingredients. To qualify for the highest organic label of "organic production," unprocessed organic plant or animal agricultural products and processed products must contain more than 95 percent certified organic ingredients.

Products over 70 percent organic can advertise the percentage of their agricultural ingredients that were grown in compliance with organic farming methods. Products comprised of less than 70 percent organic production may not use the description "organic" on the label.

Unprocessed agricultural plant products and foods consisting of a single agricultural



Organic retail store

*Photos courtesy of the FAS Office of Agricultural Affairs, Paris, France*



Organic open market

ingredient may display labeling stating "product under conversion to organic farming" at time of sale if they come from a farm that has been converting to organic farming for at least a year prior to harvest.

#### How To Obtain Organic Status

U.S. organic plant products certified under an approved system must be approved by French authorities before entering the country. Farmers and processors wishing to use "organic" on their product must submit official notification to the French Agricultural ministry, and have their operations inspected and certified by one of six private certifying organizations in France.

Organic products and foods labeled organic must travel in sealed packaging and/or containers to prevent content substitution during transportation. Packages and containers must identify the exporter, and display any stamps and numbers for batch identification. Upon delivery, the consignee must check packaging seals and labeling information.

#### Importer or Distributor Best Bet for Entry

Whether entering the retail, processing, or food service sectors, U.S. exporters can best approach the French market through an importer or distributor. U.S. companies with branded organic foods can also advertise through trade shows and specialized

#### e-Sources

##### FAS Paris: Source of Market Assistance and Information

The FAS Office of Agricultural Affairs in Paris, France, can help U.S. suppliers interested in this market, for instance with contact information on the French approval process for organics. For assistance, contact the office at: E-mail: [agparis@usda.gov](mailto:agparis@usda.gov)

For more information on the French market for U.S. organic items, visit the office's website: <http://www.amb-usa.fr/fas/fas.htm>

##### Trade Show Key to Marketing Organics

FAS Paris will also participate in **Natexpo**, the primary French organic and food supplements trade show, on Oct. 20-22, 2007. More information on the show is available at: <http://www.amb-usa.fr/fas/exporters/shows.htm>

magazines. Most supermarket chains have their own organic labels.

Best prospects include fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy products, soy-based products, processed vegetable products, muesli, oils, beverages, and food complements. ■

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